

THE ECONOMY OF THE MÁNI PENINSULA (GREECE)* IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

While investigating problems of rural settlement in the Máni peninsula of southern Greece (Fig.1) it became desirable to reconstruct the region's past economies. My scope, however, was immediately limited by the nature of the materials available. Economic information for Máni is lacking for any period other than the modern.¹ For example, the region is not given even a passing mention by Pegolotti² and it seems that the Byzantine writers were content simply to note its production of olive oil.³ In the modern period the Ottoman Land Registers (Defterler)—available for the Peloponnese sporadically between about 1480 and the late 17th century—do not cover the region.⁴ The only source appears to be the general economic information given *inter alia* by west European travellers. Single accounts, however, generally contain so little information that a number of them is required to form a true picture of the economy. Although travelogues mentioning Máni occur sporadically before the 17th century they are most numerous for the period c. 1680 to c. 1840. The only reconstruction I could make, therefore, was confined to the 18th century as limited by these two dates.

To use the travellers' accounts effectively each journey had to be dated and the route located. The special interests of the travellers, which conditioned what they saw and coloured their subsequent reports, were then noted (Table). Finally, their information had to be extracted and coordinated. Each account was broken up according to its subject matter and all the economic

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1. The modern in Greece may be said to begin with the Turkish conquest, completed about 1460.

2. F.B. Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, edited by A. Evans, The Medieval Academy of America, publication No. 24, (Cambridge, Mass., 1936).

3. Eg. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, *De Administrando Imperio*, edited by G. Moravcsik, translated by R.J.H. Jenkins (Budapest 1949, London 1962).

4. I was unable to consult the *Umūr-i Mühimne Defteri* (Register of Public Affairs). Cf. U. Heyd, *Ottoman Documents on Palestine (1552-1615)*, (1960).

information was entered on record cards. These were then catalogued under several headings. That done it was important to discover any plagiarism and thus rely only on the earliest account, although care was taken not to pass over any original material inserted by the plagiarist.

The body of material thus made available has several limitations. The dates of the sources are widely scattered over the 18th century so that a composite and perhaps distorted picture is produced, one which can take no ac-



FIG. 1

count of changes taking place over the period. The accounts, moreover, are purely descriptive and apart from W.M. Leake's "Travels in the Morea"⁵ contain no statistical material. Excessive reliance therefore, has to be placed on this one source which fortunately is very thorough, partly because Leake was on an intelligence mission for the British government. But even so his accuracy cannot be properly tested.

The other writers are not particularly concerned with the Maniot economy (Table). Remarks of an economic nature are incidental, few and widely scattered through their books. The accounts, too, do not give a complete coverage for the whole peninsula even when coordinated, so that no real

5. W.M. Leake, *Travels in the Morea* (1830).

Traveller	Date of Journey	Date of publication	Occupation	Interests	Reliability
Randolph	c. 1780	3rd Ed. 1689	? Don	The Curious	Fair
de Pellegrin	?	1722	Gentleman	Topographical Description	Fair
de Choiseul - Gouffier	1776	2nd Ed. 1842	Scientist	Topographical Description The Antique	Fair
Morritt	1795	1914	Gentleman	The Antique The 'Romantic'	Poor
Stephanopoli	1797-98	1800	Army Officers	Prospects of revolt against Turks	Good
Leake	1805-07	1830	Army Officer	Military Potential	High
Hamilton	1827	1934	Naval Officer	Piracy	Good
Yemeniz	?	1865	?	The Curious	Fair
Rodd	?	1892	Don	Folklore	Good

A Selection of the Travellers mentioning Mani

idea can be obtained of the distribution of crops or of manufacturing.⁶ It is presumably this lack of specific interest in economic affairs which has led to a number of obvious omissions. No writer makes reference to sheep and goats though they must have been of considerable importance in a region so marginal to cultivation.⁷ Fishing, too, is ignored but in defence of the writers it must be said that this activity was probably always poorly developed. Nothing is said either about the relative importance of the different items in the regional economy; even Leake is silent on this point. Finally, although the destinations of some of the exports are given there is no real indication of the extent of the trade and especially there is nothing about any return traffic. Given these limitations the travel accounts can be used to reconstruct at least the outlines of the Maniot economy as it was in the 18th century.

Basic to any economy are the subsistence crops. W.M. Leake in 1805-07 frequently noted that "every spot of earth....covered by a little soil, is cultivated in terraces of corn,"⁸ whilst Morrith a decade earlier observed between Itylo and Marathonisi (now Yithion) the mountains were scattered all over with thin corn.⁹ Other writers confirm that both wheat and barley were widespread. *Kalambokki*, or sorghum, also seems to have been cultivated everywhere,¹⁰ though Leake noted it especially in the coastal section of Bardounia, near Marathonisi (Fig. 2), where it was being grown under irrigation.¹¹ *Kalambokki* was well adapted to the conditions of geological drought which prevail in Máni because marbles and limestones form the greater part of the region. Maize was grown near Alike (Fig.2) where the mica-schist soils are fairly water retentive.¹²

The cereals were used to make bread and porridge. These were supplemented by olive oil of which a "prodigious quantity was being produced in 1797-98.¹³ Ten years later, Leake reckoned the production at 8,000-10,000 barrels in good years,¹⁴ much of it coming from the west side north of

6. Most accounts deal with the area north of a line from Tsimova to Marathonisi.

7. The region was described as "mixed marginal agricultural, grazing and waste land" on the *General Economic Map of Greece* (1:200,000) issued by the American Embassy (Athens 1947).

8. *Ibid.* vol. 1, 295; also 269, 286, 296.

9. G.E. Marindin (Ed.), *The Letters of John B.S. Morrith of Rokeby (1747-96)*, (1914), 204.

10. Leake *op. cit.*, 242.

11. *Ibid.* 266.

12. *Ibid.* 309.

13. D. et N. Stephanopoli, *Voyage de Dimo et Nicolo Stephanopoli en Grèce pendant les années V et VI (1797 et 1798)*, (Paris 1800), vol. 2, 37.

14. *Ibid.* 341.

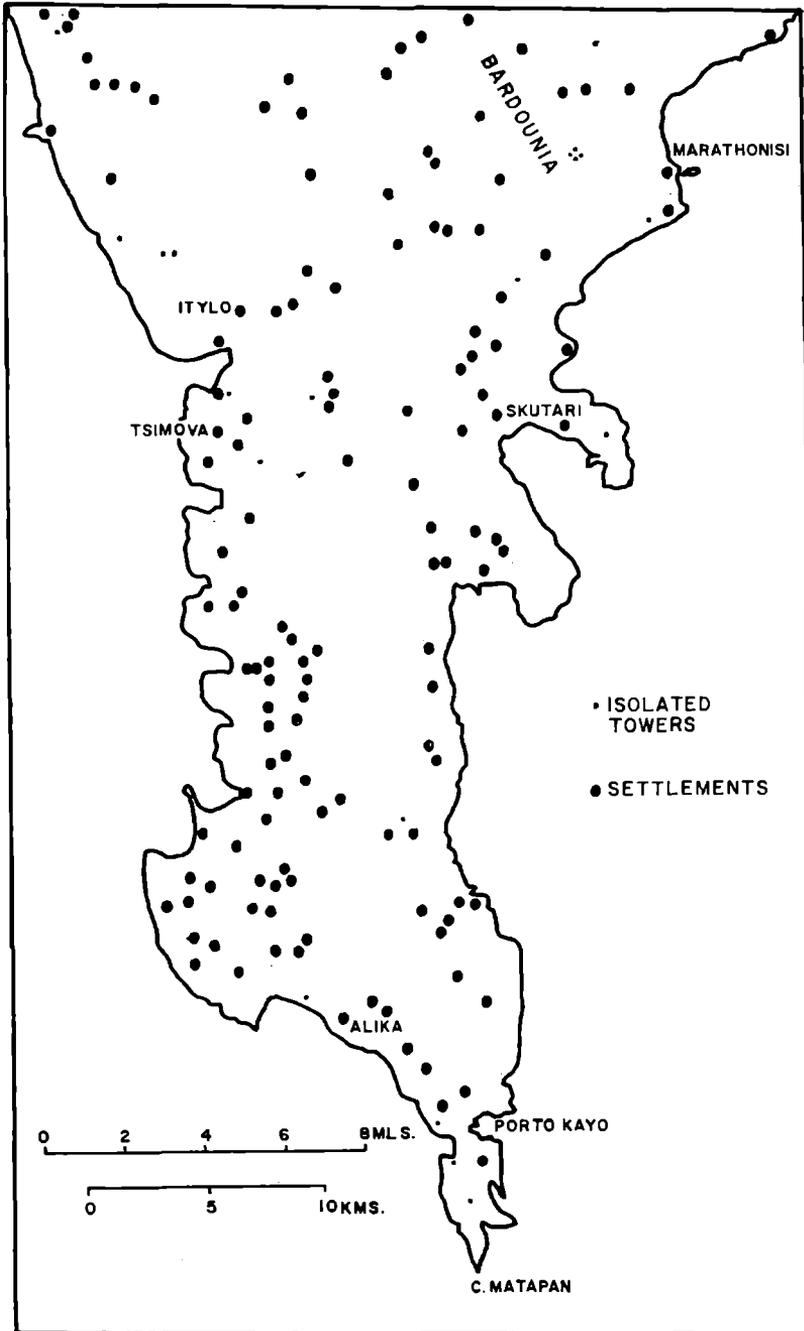


FIG.2

Itýlo.¹⁵ In the extreme south, however, olive cultivation became extensive only in the decades before A. Philippson visited the region in the 1890s.¹⁶ Thus, the olive could not have been characteristic of the whole peninsula in the 18th century. Where it was found the groves were not extensive and, as a result of the strong winds that sweep the peninsula, the trees were "stunted."¹⁷ These stunted trees which grow in a rocky soil under conditions of extreme summer aridity are generally believed to produce the best oil. Máni, in fact, had a reputation for producing the finest quality.¹⁸

The two staples were supplemented by a variety of other foods. Vines were grown on a large estate in the north-east,¹⁹ where the soils, derived from deltaic deposits of Tertiary date, are relatively fertile. Viticulture was found nowhere else. Sheep and goats must have been important judging by the present numbers (average of 872 per commune or about 30 per average family of 3.5 persons), but the writers make no reference to them, possibly because they were being grazed away from the main routes in the mountains which form a spine to the peninsula. Leake, however, saw cattle at Alike and commented that occasionally they were exported to the rest of Peloponnese.²⁰ No one else mentions cattle and it may be that they were reared only in the one place. Pigs were probably more important in the region as a whole. They were mentioned by a mid-19th century traveller²¹ and today salted ham and spiced sausages are kept for the winter. This was very probably the case in the 18th century. Meat, however, is generally unimportant since the olive largely takes its place. Probably more important were beans, chick peas and lupin seeds. Beans and chick peas are rarely mentioned²² but their distribution must have been widespread and the production considerable since "in abundant years two ship-loads are exported to Italy."²³ Used in soups with olive oil they would probably be as important an element in the diet as they are today. Lupins are mentioned twice. Dimo and Nicolo Stephanopoli noted that lupins were used in a rotation with wheat and barley "so that in this way the land never stays uncultivated."²⁴ There is no indication that this means

15. *Ibid.* 241, 310.

16. A. Philippson, *Der Peloponnes* (Berlin 1892), 243-252.

17. R. Rodd, *The Customs and Lore of Modern Greece* (1892), 70.

18. Leake *op. cit.*, 241.

19. *Ibid.* 266.

20. *Ibid.* 310.

21. Rodd, *ibid.*, 71.

22. Stephanopoli *ibid.*, vol. 2, 37; Leake *ibid.*, 242, 386.

23. Leake *ibid.* 242.

24. Stephanopoli *ibid.*, vo. 2, 37.

the elimination of a fallow period though this might be the case since lupins can be used to help maintain soil fertility.²⁵ Rodd observed that pigs fed on lupins and presumably they did so fifty years earlier.²⁶ In time of dearth lupin seeds could also be used for human consumption.

The patches for cultivation were “only a few yards square” and produced “a little thin grain, which there is no moisture to swell, and it is plucked almost ear by ear.”²⁷ The Stephanopoli make the point that crops were not abundant and Le Sieur de Pellegrin at the beginning of the century wrote, “the country scarcely produces....wheat.”²⁸ Leake’s opinion unknowingly echoing an anonymous 17th century memorandum,²⁹ was that “in good years the Maniots have corn and kalambokki sufficient for their support.”³⁰ But at the time he was in the region Leake observed that the people were in “a wretched state and have neither corn nor money.”³¹ He does not explain why this was but three possibilities may be suggested. Leake visited the region at a time when the Bey or Lord of Máni had just been outlawed by the Turkish government. This may have sparked-off a round of the clan wars typical in Máni during the 17th and 18th centuries and which resulted in the neglect of cultivation. Another possibility is that the hardship had been caused by the breakdown of the normal trading relations between Máni and Italy and western Europe during the French Wars of 1792-1815. A third and more likely possibility is suggested by the time of year at which Leake’s visit was made. The references to standing corn make it clear that it was just before the harvest, and a recent history of Máni points out that it was precisely at this time of year that the people of southern Máni at least were often in desperate straits, living on bread made from beans and chick peas.³² Whatever the reasons for the wretched state that Leake observed all the travellers are agreed that the Maniots normally lived only a knife’s edge away from starvation. Any disturbance in the balance, such as a failure of the April rains

25. A. C. de Vooy and J. J. C. Piket, *A Geographical Analysis of Villages in the Peloponnesos*, *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkundig Genootschap* 75 (1958), 30-55.

26. Rodd *ibid.* 71.

27. *Ibid.* 71.

28. Stephanopoli *ibid.* vol. 2, 37; Le Sieur de Pellegrin, *Relation du voyage de sieur de Pellegrin dans le Royaume de la Morée* (Marseille 1722), 29.

29. Naples Archives, MS, 9546, fol. 136, published in J. A. Buchon, *Nouvelles recherches historiques sur la Principauté française de Morée et ses hautes baronies* (Paris 1845), vol. 1, 280.

30. *Ibid.* 242.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Δ. Β. Δημητράκου-Μεσισκλή, *Οι Νυκλιάνοι*, vol. 1 (Athens 1949), 270.

just before the harvest or an exceptionally bad olive harvest, could easily result in dearth.³³

The Maniots supplemented their cultivation with a variety of other activities. Mention has already been made of the export of beans to Italy and the occasional sale of cattle to other parts of the Peloponnese. Honey and wax were also exported, the former to Constantinople, Candia (Iraklion in Crete) and the Aegean Islands while the wax went to Leghorn (Livorno in Italy).³⁴ Quails were another export commodity. They were netted in the Porto Kayo-Cape Matapan area whilst on their annual migrations. The birds were then salted, "put into bags of lamb-skin" and sent to Constantinople and the Aegean Islands where they were regarded as a great delicacy.³⁵

More important, however, was the export of olive oil and valonea. At the beginning of the 19th century the export of both was a monopoly of the Bey but since Beys were appointed only from 1776 this cannot have been the case throughout our period. The oil, which the Stephanopoli regarded as the chief source of the Maniots' revenue,³⁶ was exported to the Black Sea region, Italy and Trieste.³⁷ This is a slightly different pattern from that given by Randolph who in the second half of the 17th century gave the most important market as Candia,³⁸ though this might have served simply as an entrepôt.

Valonea is a substance useful in tanning which is extracted from the acorn-cups of the holm oak, a common tree in the mountains of the northern part of the peninsula. The valonea was collected in early autumn, dried and then exported through Marathonisi. "A great part" went to England and generally commanded a price a third higher than any other.³⁹ The holm oak also produced pseudo-vermilion (*prinokóki*), a brilliant scarlet dye made from a small gall apple which forms on the tree. "Mani and Bardounia (Fig. 2) together produce 20,000 okes," says Leake.⁴⁰

Some cloth manufacture also seems to have been carried on. Domestic manufacture for family use is to be expected but de Pellegrin mentions a "small trade in silks and vermilions."⁴¹ Silk is mentioned too by the Stephanopoli and Leake, the former indicating that it had some importance in the

33. The crop tends to be poor every second year.

34. Leake *ibid.* 242.

35. B. Randolph, *The Present State of the Morea* (3rd. Ed. 1689), 10; Leake *ibid.*, 242.

36. *Ibid.* vol. 1. 203.

37. Leake *ibid.* 242.

38. Randolph *ibid.* 18.

39. Leake *ibid.* 240 - 41.

40. *Ibid.* 242. 1 oka = 1280 kgs. or 2823 lbs.

41. *Ibid.* 29.

economy.⁴² Leake observed plantations of mulberry trees to the west of Skutári, presumably on the wide sheltered slope down to the village, though none exists today. At the end of the 19th century Philippson noted that silk production still flourished in the north-eastern area,⁴³ while Leake states that in his day 2,000 okes of silk were exported to the Aegean Islands and "sometimes to Leghorn and Barbary."⁴⁴ The silk may have been exported in its raw state but the remarks of de Pellegrin and the Stephanopoli suggest that it was manufactured first. Of the vermilion nothing is known. Presumably they were cloths made from local wool or just possibly from the cotton that Leake and W. Black noted a few kilometres south of Marathonisi,⁴⁵ and then dyed with pseudo-vermilion.

In addition to the export trade some local trade was probably carried on. Only one traveller of the period, however, makes reference to it. E. Yemeniz wrote that "at the tip of Magne women spend August drawing seawater" which they allow to evaporate to produce a "bitter and scented salt." This was sold throughout Máni.⁴⁶ The Maniot historian D.V. Dimitrakou-Mesiskli says that in the 18th century weavers toured the villages selling their work and that shoes were made at Tsimova (now Areópolis).⁴⁷ Near there some small-scale iron making may have taken place since old mine workings are found on a neighbouring mountain.⁴⁸ There are no references to these activities in the accounts we are considering.

Such local trade as there was must have been facilitated by the paved tracks built by command of the Bey Panayoti Koumoundouros (1796-1801) and which still carry much of the inter-village traffic. The export trade was entirely by sea, though it is not clear whether it was carried on by Maniot ships. The Venetians probably had some part in the trade and it is also possible that the same Athenian middlemen whom Randolph describes as supplying the Peloponnese "with all sorts of merchandise" were involved.⁴⁹ Merchants from Mistrá, near present-day Sparta, also had a share. Certainly, when Leake was in the peninsula the Maniot merchant marine was very small.

42. Ibid. vol. 2, 29.

43. Philippson op. cit. 249.

44. Ibid. 242. 280.

45. Leake ibid. 266; W. Black, *Narrative of Cruises in the Mediterranean in H.M.S. "Euryalus" and "Chanticleer" during the Greek War of Independence*, (Edinburgh 1900), 254 - 55.

46. E. Yemeniz, *Le Magne et les Maniotes*, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 56 (1865), 20.

47. Ibid. 60.

48. O. Davies, *Roman Mines in Europe* (1935), 253 note 6.

49. Ibid. 16.

“There was one ship and about fifty coasting boats.”⁵⁰ Although the coasting boats could have been used for the short voyages to Candia and the Aegean Islands their general use was probably more sinister, especially as fishing was probably poorly developed in the 18th century.⁵¹

The boats were used for attacking merchantmen using the Cythera passage between Crete and Cape Matapan, for the Maniots were notorious wreckers and pirates. Following ancient precedent, these activities may be regarded as forms of “acquisition” and therefore part of a region’s economy.⁵² The existence of Maniot piracy can be traced back as early as 1278⁵³ and it continued well into the 19th century. This persistence of piracy suggests that the various other forms of economic activity were not sufficient to counteract the “poverty and sterility” of the soil⁵⁴ and it may be that the people of the south “depended on the plunder from piracies for their existence.”⁵⁵ In any case, all the conditions are present which according to E. C. Semple bred piracy.⁵⁶ The food supply was uncertain and might have required supplementation with plunder. Morritt certainly thought this. “the people,” he says, “in consequence of dearth...plunder everything that approaches them.”⁵⁷ The coast is mountainous and full of coves where small boats might lurk ready to pounce on any merchantship taken unawares by one of the sudden squalls that sweep down from the coastal heights.⁵⁸ The disabled ship could easily be driven on to the rocks around Cape Matapan by menacing boats. Timber was available on the northern mountains for building the pirate craft. Moreover, the whole peninsula is so physically isolated that piratical attacks could not be prevented by the Turkish government. The build-up of large population centres was generally impossible, chiefly because of the constant feuding, and this in turn meant the relative underdevelopment of industry and commerce. Finally, the Máni peninsula lies right on the main east-west route through the Mediterranean, that between Crete and Cape Matapan.

The extent of Maniot piracy cannot really be gauged. Itýlo and Skutári

50. Ibid. 243

51. Cf. Philippon ibid., 251 on the poor development of fishing in the region.

52. Aristotle, *The Politics* 1. 1256 b.

53. W. Miller, *Latins in the Levant (1204 - 1566)*, (1908). 154 - 57.

54. Rodd ibid. 70.

55. C.G. Pitcairn-Jones, *Piracy in the Levant (1827 - 28)*, Publications of the Navy Record Society, No. 72 (1934), Introduction 17.

56. E.C. Semple, *Pirate Coasts of the Mediterranean Sea*, *Geographical Review* 2 (1916), 134 - 151.

57. Ibid. 204.

58. British Admiralty, *The Mediterranean Pilot* vol. 3 (8th Ed. 1957), 54; vol. 4 (8th Ed. 1955), 75-76.

were reported to be pirate bases⁵⁹ and Leake says that the people of another village near Tsimova were pirates.⁶⁰ The only clue to the number of ships attacked is given by Captain G.W. Hamilton's list of plunderings taking place in the twelve months ending July 1827. In that period, eight ships with British interests were attacked in the Cythera channel.⁶¹ Presumably ships of other nations were also attacked but they were not Hamilton's concern. There is no direct evidence that the pirates involved were Maniots for other pirates operated in the area, chiefly from Grabusa (an island off the north-west coast of Crete) and from the Aegean Islands, while the situation in 1826-27 was further complicated by the Greek War of Independence in which Greek privateers were attacking ships of all nations in the effort both to enforce a blockade of the Turkish forces in the Peloponnese and to pay their own sailors.⁶² The Maniots, however, are likely to have been involved. Despite the lack of detailed evidence all the travellers to Máni as well as others using the Cythera passage⁶³ agree that the Maniots infested the seas. Plunder from the merchant ships must have been very important in the Maniot economy.

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59. Yemeniz *ibid.*; Black *ibid.* 243.

61. Published as an appendix by C.G. Pitcairn-Jones, *op. cit.*

62. C.M. Woodhouse, *The Battle of Navarino* (1965), 50

63. Eg. Le Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier, *Voyage pittoresque dans l'Empire Ottoman* (2nd Ed. Paris 1842), vol. 1, 10-11.

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